

## Timesaving Tips for Mealtime

Family day care home providers have a busy day. It starts early when the children are welcomed and goes non-stop from play activities to meal prep and cleanup. Wouldn't it be nice if the kitchen fairies would appear when mealtime was at hand?

The tips below can save time and help a busy child care provider make meals seem to appear out of thin air. Many of the tips are time savers for child care centers, too. The ideas are linked to the menu suggestions in this issue of *Mealtime Memo*.

### Cook Once, Serve Twice

Most recipes from *USDA Recipes for Child Care* ([www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org)) yield 25 or 50 servings. A provider caring for 10 young children could make the 25 serving recipe. She could serve half of the recipe today, and chill and freeze the other half for a meal another week. When recipes make twice the amount needed for one meal, the meal prep work is cut nearly in half.

Two recipes that fit this idea are the Pork Stir Fry (D-18B) and Meatballs (D-28A) from this *Mealtime Memo* menu. Be sure to follow food safety guidelines to properly

- Chill,
- Label and date,
- Freeze,
- Store,
- Thaw, and
- Reheat foods.

A three-week cycle menu helps put this tip into practice. In a cycle menu, the planned daily meals repeat. A three-week cycle repeats once every 3 weeks.



### Keep Recipe Amounts in Reserve

Another timesaver is to prepare and freeze recipe size packages of foods. Thaw packages in the refrigerator prior to use in recipes. Items can also be safely thawed in a microwave oven. The time it takes to stock the freezer will more than off set the time saved during a busy day.

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Meats and whole grains often require longer cooking times. These foods are great choices for this tip.

For example, cook and drain ground beef. Divide into recipe size amounts and place in freezer containers. Label and date each pack. Chill quickly by placing containers in ice and then freeze. Use the same method for beef or pork roasts, chicken, or turkey. A pre-measured package of chopped chicken makes a recipe easy to finish. Whole grains, such as brown rice, cracked wheat, or barley, can be cooked in large pans in the oven. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recipe for Cooking Rice (A-18) explains how to cook rice in the oven (brown rice is listed in the tips section). Again, follow food safety guidelines to cool foods quickly. Rapidly chill the food using an appropriate cooling method.



- Place food in shallow containers no more than 4 inches deep uncovered on the top shelf of a cooler.
- Use a quick-chill unit like a blast chiller.
- Stir the food in a container placed in an ice water bath.
- Add ice as an ingredient.
- Separate food into smaller or thinner portions to cool.

## **Put Convenience Foods to Work**

Box mixes for noodle or rice dishes are easy to use. Most, however, provide more salt than most children or adults need. Make a box mix a better choice. The idea is to dilute the amount of salt per serving by increasing the amount of grain in the recipe.

Here is how to put the idea to work. Check to see how many cups of cooked noodles or rice the box mix yields. Then, add the same amount of a cooked whole-grain noodle or rice to the mix after it is prepared. If needed, add a little more water to extend clear sauces or milk to a cheesy or white sauce to coat the extra noodles or rice.



This method makes twice the number of servings with half the amount of sodium. The added whole grains increase the fiber in the dish, too. For example, a pasta and cheese flavored sauce mix yields 2 cups of cooked rotini noodles. By adding two cups of cooked whole wheat rotini to the finished mix (and a little milk, if needed, to extend the sauce), the combined dish now has 8 ½ cup servings. The original mix had 740 milligrams (mg) of sodium per half cup serving – nearly ⅓ of the daily sodium limit recommended in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The new mix has about 370 mg of sodium.

To add variety to the menu planned, a provider could substitute this new mixed pasta dish for the whole wheat roll served with the Meatballs (D-28A) and broccoli.

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Be sure to record any food changes on the menu (and the production record if one is used.) **Mealtime Memo No. 2, 2009: Production Records: A Tool to Use** can assist in planning and using a production record.

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Sample Production Record for a CACFP site serving 3-5 year old children (i.e., a single age group)

Date each record.

Centers with more than one location need to fill in the each location. Homes can list name or address.

**Daily Menu Production Record**

(1) Date:		Site:						
Meal Pattern	Menu (2)	Food Item Used (3)	Quantity Used (4)	Serving Size (5)	AG (6)	CP (7)	PA (8)	LO (9)
Meat/Meat Alternate 1 ½ ounce	Lean ham and egg in Not Fried Rice	List brand of ham and size of eggs purchased	12 ounces ham; 7 large eggs	1 ounce	3-5 year olds	10	1 (2-oz)	No ham left
Grains/Bread ½ ounce equivalent (½ slice)	Not Fried Rice (Recipe A-08) (1 slice bread equivalent in two #10 scoops)	Brown Rice – Cooking Rice A-18 prepped with Teriyaki Chicken menu	1 lb 9 oz cooked (2 pans from freezer)	Two #10 scoops (½ cup)		10	1	2 cups
Fruits and Vegetables ½ cup total, of two different choices	Vegetables in Not Fried Rice (½ cup in two #10 scoops) Orange Smiles	Frozen peas, carrots for Rice; Fresh Oranges (125 ct size)	13 ounces of each vegetable; 2 lbs oranges	½ cup in rice ½ orange (½ c)		10	1	1
Milk, ½ cup (6 ounces) fluid milk	Milk	List brand of milk purchased	3 quarts or ¾ gallon	6 ounce (8 oz adult)		10	1	3 ½ cups

Notes:  
Items in script typeface (Quantity Used and LO) are intended to look hand written as these are items filled in on the record when the meal is produced.  
Two #10 scoops of Not Fried Rice would provide the equivalent of 1 lean meat (½ ounce per #10 scoop). One ounce lean ham and two #10 scoops of Not Fried Rice provide 2 ounce meat alternate total. Menu written to provide more than minimum serving amounts for children 3-5 years old.

3

Frozen vegetables are a convenience food to use often. These nutrition bargains are timesavers. Someone has picked, cleaned, and cut the vegetables. Frozen vegetables provide fiber and have less salt added than can vegetables (read labels to be sure) – another bonus!

The recipe for Vegetable Soup (H-11) calls for fresh or frozen vegetables. Many USDA recipes call for timesaving ingredients when possible.

Notice the lunch menu calls for adding kidney beans to the soup. The Grilled Sandwich (F-03) provides 1 ¼ ounce of meat per ½ sandwich. In order to meet the meat and meat alternate requirement for the meal, another ¼ ounce of meat equivalent is needed.

Canned beans are another great convenience food. Drain and rinse canned beans to remove extra salt.

Dried beans, like meats and whole grains, can be cooked ahead of time and portioned in recipe amounts. Canned beans are convenient, but bags of dried beans cost less. With proper planning, dried peas and beans can fit into a busy schedule.

If the beans are added to the soup, serve ½ cup more per child to assure meal requirements are met. Or, heat the beans separately and add ½ cup beans to each ½ cup of soup. The second option is easy for a small group. Centers may prefer the increased serving size option.

These timesaving ideas are not magic, just the next best thing for a busy family day care home provider.

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## Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Cooked farina Grape juice Milk	French toast Fruit cocktail Milk	Shredded wheat cereal (bite size) Banana Milk	Banana Muffin A-04 <sup>1</sup> Apple juice Milk	Toasted English muffin Apricots Milk

## Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Tortilla Roll-Up F-07 <sup>1</sup> Corn Kiwi Milk	Grilled Sandwich F-03 <sup>1</sup> Vegetable Soup H-11 <sup>1</sup> Fruit and Rice Dessert B-09 <sup>1</sup> Milk	Pork Stir Fry D-18B <sup>1</sup> Brown Rice A-18 <sup>1</sup> Pears Milk	Mexican Pizza D-13 <sup>1</sup> Tossed salad with lowfat ranch dressing Strawberries Graham crackers Milk	Meatballs D-28A <sup>1</sup> Broccoli Peaches Whole wheat roll Milk

## Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Peanut Butter Dip G-01 <sup>1,2</sup> Carrot sticks Celery sticks Water <sup>3</sup>	Tabouleh E-23 <sup>4</sup> Cucumber and summer squash sticks Shredded carrots Water <sup>3</sup>	Apple slices String cheese Water <sup>3</sup>	Yogurt Fresh pear slices Water <sup>3</sup>	Bean Dip G-02 <sup>1</sup> on tortilla half Zucchini sticks Water <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org).

<sup>2</sup>Sunflower butter can be substituted for peanut butter.

<sup>3</sup>Water is suggested as a beverage for all snacks even when other beverages are offered to encourage children to drink water.

<sup>4</sup>USDA Recipes for Schools. Available online at [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org).

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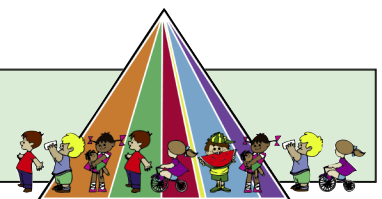
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